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SUBJECT: SENIOR PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR DISCUSSES IMPENDING
NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE

Classified By: Polcouns Theodore Tanoue for 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A senior Presidential Office insider said that the outlook for the no-confidence motion introduced in Parliament was uncertain, with results likely hinging on whether parliament opts for a secret ballot or a more transparent process. While the PNL continues to refuse entreaties from the PSD for a face-saving cohabitation agreement, there was concern that a PSD offer to join ranks in delaying local elections until 2008 might prove irresistible to the PNL. He added that the PD was itself looking to create a new government with ministers drawn from PD and PLD ranks, with support from the PNL and UDMR. First choice for Prime Minister was former Interior Minister (and Basescu confidante) Vasile Blaga, with a more "technocratic" choice such as former PNL Foreign Minister Ungureanu being a fall-back option. While the PD had rejected joining the PSD in an immediate post-Tariceanu coalition, Basescu had reportedly held out to Geoana an offer to bring the PSD into governance after the 2008 parliamentary election, but only if Geoana cleaned house and expelled old-guard PSD leaders. End Summary.

¶2. (C) At a meeting with Polcouns 9/24, Senior Presidential Office Advisor Sebastian Lazaroiu opined that the outlook of the no-confidence motion against the Tariceanu administration was uncertain. While it might mean the end of the Tariceanu era, there was also the possibility many PSD parliamentarians would fail to support the motion if it came to a secret ballot. (Note: in an aside, Lazaroiu described as "stupid" a motion from PD President Emil Boc to change the voting rules in Parliament to institute an open vote, noting that it was far simpler for the PD and PLD leadership to compel their members to cast their votes openly, thus revealing through a process of elimination how the PSD bloc voted.) Lazaroiu said that PSD Chamber of Deputies Whip Viorel Hrebenciuc was still working actively behind the scenes to get the PNL to accept a face-saving cohabitation agreement to stave off the vote. Asked whether the PD and PNL were talking as well, Lazaroiu responded blankly, "we have offered them a continued political life". He explained that the PD had offered a mutual "non-aggression" pact guaranteeing that the PD would not accept defecting politicians from the PNL. He predicted that otherwise, PNL members would abandon the party in droves once the party lost the government.

¶3. (C) Asked why the PNL had not responded to PSD entreaties, Lazaroiu responded that he had heard that the PNL had conducted an internal survey of party members on the way ahead, and that a majority--57 percent--had rejected any deal with the PSD. Lazaroiu added that any partnership with the current PSD--even a tacit one--was tantamount to "political suicide" as the PSD was still seen as tainted by corruption in the eyes of the voters. For the same reason, the PD was disinclined towards any alliance with the PSD as currently

constituted. The preference was for a government headed by former Interior Minister Vasile Blaga, with ministers drawn from PD and PLD ranks. Such a government would also need the support of the PNL and UDMR. He said that a second--far less likely--option was a government headed by a "technocratic" PNler, such as former Foreign Minister Ungureanu. He opined that the bottom line for the PD was that it would accept either a PD or PNL government for a one-year period.

Lazaroiu dismissed the option of cobbling together a PD-led coalition with smaller parties, and specifically rejected bringing the right-extremist PNG into governance after future parliamentary elections.

¶4. (C) Lazaroiu said that during his recent meeting with PSD head Mirecea Geoana, President Basescu had reminded Geoana of his earlier offer (reportedly made during negotiations prior to Basescu's suspension last spring) that "you can join the government after 2008, but only after you finish cleaning up your own party." Lazaroiu noted that even if the no-confidence motion succeeded and Geoana managed to oust the Tariceanu government, Geoana would never get the nod from Basescu to form a new government. Better, he said, that Geoana lose the no-confidence motion, since it would provide him with a pretext for accusing his rivals in the PSD (including Iliescu and Nastase) of sabotaging the vote, giving him an opening to finally "clean out" the PSD.

¶5. (C) Lazaroiu commented that the PLD remained the weakest link. It was a small party and was vulnerable to having many of its members' votes "bought off". Moreover, the party had until recently been demoralized and depressed about its future prospects, with many PLD members reportedly contemplating re-defecting back to the PNL. He said that this was worrisome since it could bring the opprobrium for a failed no-confidence vote on the President's erstwhile allies

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rather than on the PSD. Lazaroiu confided that another concern was the danger that the PNL and PSD would agree to postpone local elections to coincide with the 2008 parliamentary elections. He noted that PSD legislative whip Hrebenciuc had floated the idea quietly in the press in recent days, and that such a move could easily be accomplished if the PSD and PNL agreed to amending the election law to extend the mandate of local governments by nine months or so if the PNL and PSD agreed to such a move. This would neutralize any benefits from a PD victory in the November. Finally, Lazaroiu also acknowledged that the Senate would be problematic for any PD-led cabinet, since no matter how one sliced and diced the current lineup, there would be no PD-led majority possible in the Senate, meaning that legislative priorities would likely face rough going.

¶6. (C) Comment: As Lazaroiu himself acknowledged, President Basescu and his allies now hold many--but not all--of the cards. A challenge for the Presidential palace is in creating an incentive for Geoana to finally push through with expelling the old guard from the PSD, including Iliescu, Nastase, and Hrebenciuc. In Lazaroiu's view, this would allow Basescu to carry out plans for wide-ranging constitutional reforms that would require a substantial parliamentary majority comprised of elements from the old PD, PNL, PSD, and PLD. This strategy harkens back to Basescu's ambitions earlier last year to forge a "Presidential" party out of the current political lineup. However, the prospect of a decidedly junior partnership with Basescu only after elections in 2008 may not be appealing enough for Geoana. In the meantime, the no-confidence motion was introduced by the PSD 9/24 and will be read in plenary session this coming Thursday, with a vote expected by Wednesday next week. End Comment.

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